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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7177
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1728
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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; G/TIP
PACOM FOR FPA
BANGKOK FOR ECON - MIKE HEATH
TREASURY FOR OASIA: SCHUN
GENEVA FOR LABOR ATTACHE

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SUBJECT: BURMA INKS NEW TIP NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. The GOB on February 4 signed a new five-year National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons, showing renewed commitment to combating TIP in Burma. The five-year plan, which lays out GOB priorities for 2007-2011, was then approved by both the Cabinet and Senior Generals on February 7. Head of the Police Office against Transnational Crime Colonel Sit Aye identified the GOB's priorities in 2008, which include conducting various training courses, improving support services provided to victims, raising public awareness, implementing the National Action Plan, and improving coordination with China and Thailand on cross-border TIP issues. End summary.

Strengthening the COMMIT Process

¶2. (SBU) Trafficking in persons is a significant problem in Burma, and the Burmese become more vulnerable to trafficking as the country's economy deteriorates. Burma is a source country for women, children, and men trafficked both domestically and across borders to Thailand, China, and Malaysia for the purposed of forced labor and commercial sex exploitation. The GOB in 2005 passed its Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law and has taken steps in recent years to improve the ability of relevant government offices - the national police anti-TIP task force and the Department of Social Welfare - to focus on the prevention of TIP, protection of victims of TIP, and prosecution of traffickers. According to Colonel Sit Aye, Head of the Police Office against Transnational Crime, the GOB in 2007 investigated 236 TIP-related cases, identified 237 traffickers and arrested 174 of them, prosecuted 18 cases, and convicted 31 people

of violating the Anti-Trafficking in Persons law.

¶3. (SBU) Since 2004, the Burmese Government has participated in the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT), led by UNIAP. The COMMIT process attempts to better coordinate anti-trafficking programs and policies among the six countries in the greater Mekong region - China, Burma, Vietnam, Thailand, Lao, and Cambodia. During the first two years, the GOB's political commitment to COMMIT was not as strong as the other countries' due to the lack of understanding of TIP, as well as denial that it was an issue in Burma. As a result, the GOB fell behind in implementing many of COMMIT activities. In the past two years, according to UNIAP officials, the GOB has made strides to improve its coordination with COMMIT, adopting ways to improve monitoring and evaluation of the counter-TIP program.

¶4. (SBU) The best example of the GOB's renewed commitment to anti-trafficking is the recent signing of a five-year National Action Plan against Trafficking, Matt Friedman, Regional Project Manager of UNIAP, told us. On February 4, the Minister of Home Affairs inked the agreement, which was later approved by the Cabinet and Senior Generals on February 7, 2008. According to Colonel Sit Aye, the GOB began the process of drafting the five-year plan in ¶2006. In March 2007, the GOB met with UN agencies and NGOs to review the plan and obtain guidance on how to best tackle the trafficking problem. After taking into account these perspectives, as well as the various GOB ministries' priorities, it finalized the National Action Plan (NAP), which will go into effect by March 2008, Sit Aye concluded.

2008 Priorities

¶5. (SBU) As part of the NAP, the GOB established a workplan for activities in 2008, which has not been made public. Although its

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plans are ambitious, Sit Aye observed, the GOB ministries - Home Affairs and Social Welfare - can fulfill them, bringing Burma more in line with the other Mekong countries. In 2008, the GOB will:

- conduct various training courses, including train the trainers courses and multiplier courses for police, social workers, prosecutors, and judges. Focus on how to improve support services provided to victims;

- participate in regional training courses under the COMMIT program;

- begin implementation of the National Action Plan, including coordinating with various ministries on how to establish monitoring mechanisms for NAP programs;

- continue working with the Governments of Thailand and China to establish MOUs on cross-border cooperation. Expand border liaison offices to new regions, such as Kachin State; and

- raise public awareness of trafficking and strengthen measures to reduce vulnerability to trafficking.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) The Burmese people continue to face economic hardship, caused primarily by the GOB's gross mismanagement of the economy. As their economic plight worsens, women and children particularly become more vulnerable to trafficking. While the GOB officials we met with recognize the problem, they have no authority to solve the underlying causes of trafficking. So instead they must focus on how to rescue victims of trafficking and improve coordination with neighboring governments to target trafficking activities. The National Action Plan is a step in the right direction, providing the GOB agencies with a framework in which to improve their ability to counter trafficking. While the GOB's 2008 workplan is ambitious, improved efforts will benefit victims and help prevent others from becoming victims. We have plenty to criticize the Burmese

government about. However, this is one area where we can acknowledge efforts being made to protect its citizens.

VILLAROSA